



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

News Release

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ICE RETURNS \$20,000 TO ELDERLY NORTHERN CALIFORNIA LOTTERY SCAM VICTIM

Agency warns public not to fall for telemarketing get rich quick schemes

OROVILLE, Calif. — Special agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today returned \$20,000 to an elderly Oroville man victimized by telemarketing con artists in Canada who promised him a \$2 million lottery windfall.

The money returned to the 74 year old Oroville man was recovered by investigators as part of Project COLT, a multi-agency initiative targeting telemarketing fraud involving ICE, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. Postal Service Inspection Service.

ICE agents say the ploy used on the victim is a common one employed by telemarketing fraudsters. The Oroville man was told to obtain his lottery windfall, he would have to forward “processing” payments to the scammers. After receiving a lead, investigators for the Butte County District Attorney’s Office noted cash shipments being sent by the victim to the scammers and notified ICE and Canadian law enforcement authorities. Canadian officials were able to locate and seize two packages containing \$10,000 each in Canada before they were delivered to the scammers.

Rick Eaton, assistant special agent-in-charge of the ICE office in Sacramento, warned consumers to be wary of such scams, which have already bilked people, especially senior citizens, out of tens of millions of dollars.

“Unfortunately, as is the case with this gentleman, most scam victims rarely get all their money back,” said Eaton. “We are doing everything we can to stop this kind of fraud, but the first line of defense is for people to be suspicious of people calling and asking them to send money.”

“These con artists are very believable,” Eaton added. “They pass themselves off as trustworthy, and are persistent until they get as much money as possible from their victims.”

Fraudulent telemarketers pose as lawyers, government officials, police officers, accountants or lottery company officials. The victims are told that they will receive a sum of money varying from thousands to millions of dollars in lottery winnings.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey stated “as we have always said, if it sounds too good to be true, it is.”

Initiated in 1998, the goal of Project COLT is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle telemarketing fraud operations. As part of the initiative, law enforcement officers strive to intercept funds (usually bank drafts and cashiers' checks), so they can ultimately be returned to victims. Project COLT investigators also work to prevent further victimization both through public education and the prosecution of those who commit the fraud.

Project COLT members also have formed partnerships with Canada Border Services Agency, Canada Post Corporation, Federal Express, Purolator, United Parcel Service, DHL and other companies to assist with fund interception and return.

Before sending any money to telemarketers, ICE urges the public to contact the Project COLT toll-free hotline at: 1-888-495-8501. More information on the initiative is also available through the Project COLT web site: http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/qc/pro_ser/delits_e.htm.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.